骸骨騎士様、只今異世界へお出掛け中 III

Skeleton Knight, going out to the parallel universe

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OVERLAP

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アリアン
「あーくの癖ににやま意気なぉよ～！
わらしに酒がちゅげないってのぉ～!?」
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Enoki Hakuu
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III

Prologue

The Great Leburan Empire of the northern continent's western region.

The capital of the Empire was called Vittelvare. It was a metropolis that had acted as the capital of the Leburan Empire even before it split into its eastern and western half, yet it still retained its dignified appearance.

A giant wall, erected out of polished stone, was built around the city. When a person left or entered the city they would see impeccably maintained streets and parks, as well as a multitude of pleasant looking people chatting about.

At the center of the capital was the emperor's palace, that was the size of a small town, dubbed Dionborg.

In a certain section of the palace, the rulers of the Great Leburan Empire were gathering in a hall. The current emperor, Garba Leburan Sergio Phoebus, sat on a luxurious throne at the apex of the national assembly.

His long white hair and beard were carefully combed back. Though the wrinkles on his forehead were thick, his eyes still carried the sharp glint of a bird of prey. Atop his head sat a gold and jewel encrusted crown, that acted as the symbol of imperial authority, and his body was adorned in extravagant clothes and a luxurious mantle. The gorgeous scepter in his hand was proof of the emperor's power.

Directly beside the sullen emperor sat a handsome young man and the country's five chancellors. In the emperor's line of sight sat the empire's fifty senators who were in the middle of arguing amongst themselves.

"Wetorias and the surrounding areas have been isolated by the frequent monster attacks! We request the national army to be dispatched immediately! The East is eying the land from across the Shiari river. With things as they are now, we have to prevent the East from crossing over."

"What did you say?! Wetorias already has one of the army's battalions stationed there! With those numbers, it should be easy to wipe out mere monsters!"

"That's right! If the East discovered that two thousand honorable soldiers of the border territory asked for aid, we would become a laughing stock! Not to mention the fact that moving the army would be a heavy financial burden! Is the north territory willing to take on that burden?"

"Huh, the southern territories can handle it! Didn't the Urato and Shiana Mountain ranges have military forts at their bases for the sole purpose of slaying monsters? This is an opportunity to show their power and importance to everyone!"

Each senator was elected from their respective territories and thus this shouting match was nothing more than them trying to reap the most benefits for their territory.

The Great Leburan Empire was divided into four regions that were then broken up into territories ruled over by feudal lords. As a result, there were often skirmishes between the nobles of each region.

The emperor lowered his head at their unsightly bickering before looking at the man to his side. The handsome man, who was boasting a wide smile, was Saruwisu De Osto. He was the emperor's official aide and as such rarely expressed any emotion beyond the smile stuck on his face.

Emperor Garba started speaking at a low enough volume so that the chancellors couldn't hear him.

"What are your thoughts about the recent monster attacks?"

The senators were too busy arguing amongst themselves to look in this direction. Saruwisu turned away from the senators and looked at the emperor before he started to speak.

"With all due respect, according to our spies, it seems that the East has finally succeeded in their attempts to control monsters…… If that's the case, then their main goal could be Burugo Bay south of Wetorias."

Emperor Garba's expression soured when he heard Saruwisu answer.

"I've heard there have been frequent sightings of Giant Basilisks and Ogres around Wetorias. If these beings can be controlled as the report says, then they could really pose a threat."

"However, since no soldiers have been spotted so far, couldn't it be possible that the East is just testing the effectiveness of the monsters at Wetorias?"

The Emperor glanced out into the distance as he sunk back into his throne.

"Hmph, if that eastern brat had such shallow thinking we would have devoured them a long time ago. The monsters probably aren't tamed enough to be used alongside regular soldiers. The question is if they could be used in an ambush……"

"Should we take control of the northern army due to the recent raids?"

"No, if we make unnecessary moves in Wetorias, we would leave ourselves open for an attack across the river from Jerina. We should avoid being wedged between a northern and southern assault."

The Emperor rested his elbow on his throne and stroked his chin as he expressed his concern.

"The East's plans will surely be affected by what has transpired in Rhoden though."

The emperor's eyebrow raised upon hearing Saruwisu remake.

“Certainly. However, that Rhoden boy needs to gain control of the kingdom immediately.”

Emperor Garba stood up after saying that and furiously banged his scepter against the floor. The senators that had been arguing till now went completely silent as they focused on the emperor.

“Be quiet—”

Garba glared at all of the senators and told them to cease their arguments with a sonorous voice.

“If we leave things in Wetorias as they are now, we’d only be inviting those eastern rebels to cross the river. This situation will be handled by the army immediately, the southern army stationed at the northern edge of Tabor shall be dispatched as support.”

Something like a groan escaped the mouths of the senators at the emperor’s declaration. One of the older members stepped up and raised his hand. The emperor allowed the man to speak with a jerk of his chin.

“With all due respect, Tabor is located between the Urato mountains and the Bayonne mountains, an area prone to monster attacks. If the southern army patrolling that area is dispatched to Wetorias, wouldn’t that cause the trade and travel along the highway to stagnate?”

One after another, other members of the senate started to voice their opinions to the Emperor.

“The troops under the command of general Keling stationed at Harutobarak should be sent instead of those at Tabor. The Tabor soldiers can continue their duty while everything is underway.

“But in that situation the defenses at Harutobarak will be undermanned if-”

“The area doesn’t require such heavy protection since there are divisions located east of the Urato mountains and west of the Shiana mountains respectively.”

The older members of the senate write off of any potential problems, making quite a few other senators to sneer at them. A chuckle even escaped the lips of the observing senators.

“Are there any other opinions? Please remain standing if you are opposed to the suggestion.”

The senators simultaneously glanced at one another after the Emperor spoke, before rapidly taking their seats. Only a small number of senators remained standing.

Saruwisu looked around the hall for a moment before declaring the matter settled and moving on to the next point on the agenda.

Chapter 1:「To the West」Part 1

Two people were walking down the highway at dusk. The sky was proceeding to turn a pale blue as dawn slowly approached.

A cool mist was coming off the Calcutta mountains in the north that obscured the vision of anyone trying to traverse the highway.

In the middle of this mist, there was a tall woman dressed in a gray cloak walking next to me. Visible through a gap in her cloak were a protective leather corset and the hem of a shirt that was easy to move in. Despite her humble attire, her large chest, thin waist, and round buttocks made her womanly charms known to all who saw her.

However, one look at her face revealed that she wasn't a human.

Her skin was smooth and lilac tinted, her hair long and snow-white, her eyes that stared straight ahead were golden and the ears at the side of her head were pointed.

She was one of this world's dark elves and currently my employer for the job I had taken on.

This woman was Ariane Glenys Maple. The majority of the elves lived in the Great Canada Forest and she was one of the forest's elite soldiers.

At her waist hung a sword with a guard in the form of a lion's head, which she could wield with enough proficiency to outclass skilled adventures. In this age, the main assets of the elves were their in-depth magical knowledge and their ability to use spirit magic that humans were unable to replicate.

As for myself, my body was the one of my game avatar that I had been playing as before I had been transferred into this world.

Underneath my black cloak was a set of full body armor fitting for a mythical knight, that had fine details etched into every piece along with white and blue undertones.

A jet black mantle, that was inlaid with a pattern seemingly cut from the starry night sky, hung off my shoulders.

A large, elaborately decorated shield and a two-handed broadsword were tied on my back, covering the luggage sack I have carried since the start of my travels.

The only problem was that inside this armor was nothing but a walking skeleton.

Underneath my helmet I was lacking a nose and the light of the dead filled my eye sockets.

Ariane had been the first person to see my true self without raising her sword against me. Since the number of people who would do that could be counted with the fingers on my hands, I couldn't take off my helmet in public.

However, I've had the good fortune to come across a small number of people that have

been willing to except me.

Though I always had terrible luck at lotteries in my previous world, my luck seems to have improved since I've come here.

While I was absorbed in my thoughts, Ariane suddenly called out to me.

"Arc, what did you think of Chiome's magic the other day?"

Arc was the name of my game character whose body I now possessed, and I had decided to act the same way I always did when I played the game. No, i am still not quite accustomed to this character's way of living, but it became natural enough to not feel uncomfortable.

I looked at Ariane as I thought for a moment before breaking eye contact and looked straight ahead.

Chiome was the name of the girl we had helped freeing her enslaved brethren from a slave trading company in Rhoden Kingdom's capital the other day. She had been a member of the People of the Plains and Mountains, the so-called beastmen that grew animal ears and tails.

Her ancestors had been led by another person from my world who appeared in this world six hundred years ago. Thanks to his influence, Chiome's people formed the ninja-like Blade Heart Clan, whose purpose was to liberate their enslaved brethren scattered across the continent.

The elves and the people of the Plains and Mountains were persecuted by the humans of the northern continent, and thus they were exposed to the threat of slavery. Even in this strange world, prejudice among the races, similar to the history of Africans and Europeans, still existed.

My modern sensibilities as an Asian man saw neither Africans nor Europeans as superior to the other. That reminded me, when I had skin it was rather sensitive and would easily tan, though it wasn't like I could be mistaken for a—

I had this strange feeling that I was missing something, but I didn't know what.

Shaking the unrelated thoughts from my head I returned my gaze to Ariane.

Anyway, the reason Ariane and I were walking down this path was because it led to the next destination in our quest to free the enslaved elves.

In the Kingdom's capital, Ariane, Chiome and I worked as a team in cooperation with the other agents of the Blade Heart Clan.

Ariane was probably talking about Chiome's occasional use of ninjutsu. It seemed that ninjutsu could pass for magic in this fantasy world.

"Hum, is it possible that it was ninjutsu? You could be confusing the two Ariane-dono."

“What she called ninjutsu seemed like a form of spirit magic to me……’

I let out a surprised cry at her comment.

“Huh? I thought that only the elves were capable of using spirit magic, but is it different?”

Ariane shook her head at my question.

“No, there were never any real restrictions on which races could use spirit magic. Even a human would be capable of using spirit magic if they make a proper contract ……However, it’s said that communicating with spirits is extremely difficult and potentially fatal for humans.”

Apparently, it was possible in theory, but synonymous with impossible in practice. I thought about some of the characteristics of the People of the Plains and Mountains as I walked.

“Now that you mention it, aren’t the People of the Plains and Mountains capable of bonding with spirit beasts?”

Spirit beast was the general name for creatures that housed the power of a spirit in their body, and they were extremely wary of humans. The elves and the People of the Plains and Mountains seemed to be the only ones that could tame spirit beasts.

“That’s right, however, most of the People of the Plains and Mountains have low magical power, so it’s rare for a contract to be established. Still, a few of them should at least be capable of performing spirit magic, however…”

Ariane lowered her eyes as if she was remembering what she saw in the capital the other day.

“When it comes to spirit beasts……”

She lifted her gaze to the spot atop of my head. She was looking at the place where the spirit beast Ponta currently and usually sat.

Ponta was a fox-like creature that was roughly sixty centimeters long. Her tail made up half of her body length and was puffed out like a dandelion. Despite her fox head, there were patches between her forelegs and hind legs that were similar to the legs of a flying squirrel. Her rather soft fur was green on the top and white on her underbelly.

The popular name for this kind of spirit beast was ‘Fluffy Fox’ and she had been with me ever since I freed her from a group of bandits.

Ponta was capable of using spirit magic to manipulate the wind and fly freely in the sky.

When she noticed Ariane’s stare, Ponta tilted her head.

“Kyun?”

I wonder if there was some kind of connection between Chiome's people and spirit beasts like Ponta.

"What are you trying to say?"

I asked her about my honest concerns.

Ariane looked back at me before she began to slowly give her response.

"The spirit magic we elves use and the magic of the spirit beasts are different from each other. Based on the contract we've made, we have to offer a set amount of our own mana to the elemental spirits, who then convert it into magic. Spirit beast don't need to form contracts since they are one with the spirits. They can simply convert their mana into magic directly.

"Hoo? So you're saying that Chiome-dono not only managed to form a contract with a spirit but they also achieved a type of unification in order to use her brand of magic?"

"That's right."

Ponta suddenly loudly yawned before laying down on my helmet.

I raised my hand as asked Ariane another question I had

"Ariane-dono, are the elves capable of seeing spirits?"

"Yes. Elves can perceive magical entities that humans can not. We are able to see spirits and that allows us to facilitate communication with them. Do you remember the time we entered Great Canada Forest?"

She looked back as she asked about the time we visited the elven village of Raratoia a while ago. I nodded as I thought about the large forest

"The reason we avoided encounters with powerful monsters is because we only traversed paths with thin layers of mana. Dark elves are superior to normal elves in many physical aspects and one of those areas happens to be our perception capabilities."

I came to a realization at her comment. When we entered the forest we didn't go straight to the village, instead taking a complex path that I thought was meant to prevent me from knowing the way.

"I thought that was to prevent me from learning the way to the village……"

Hearing my muttering, Ariane looked a little surprised before shrugging her shoulders.

"Arc, you have transfer magic. What purpose would that have served?"

I realized she was right about that. I had a form of magic for both long-range and short-range transportation. It was a convenient spell that allowed me to transfer to any location

that I could visualize, so it wasn't really necessary for me to learn the way to any place. I suppose my directionally challenged self would be in a tough situation without transfer magic.

However,【Transfer Gate】required me to have visited the location I wanted to transfer to at least once. On the other hand,【Dimensional step】could only be used at short distances and was unusable if my line of sight was greatly impaired.

"Hum, so the reason the elves can live in a monster-filled forest is because of that ability……"

"There are differences between individuals. They say that the magic power of the first cheif, Evangeline-sama, was so great that she could detect almost every monster.."

The first elven cheif of the elves was the one who had built the capital Maple and is someone I suspected of crossing into this world the same way I did. Maybe that person came to this world in the body of an elf, and that ability was something exclusive to the elves?

However, she had said "most" and not "all" monsters, so there might have been limits to that ability…… A shame there was no way to question the deceased about this.

Dawn gradually started to break as I continued to ruminate on what I'd learned and walked down the highway. The mist coming off the mountain began to clear as daylight approached, and a cool wind blew across the area

The sound of the wind stroking the trees and plants welcomed the new day. The view of the highway opened up and I started to see a village in the distance.

We hadn't really traveled far from the capital since I could still make out its vague outline in the distance.

"The surroundings have cleared up a bit. Let's distance ourselves from here before anyone else comes by."

When I nodded at her suggestion, Ariane placed her hand on my shoulder.

"【Dimensional Step】"

When I invoked the short range transfer magic we had moved to the farthest point of the highway I had been able to see.

I repeat to use the transfer magic on the highway that led to Lanbaltic, our next destination.

Chapter 2:「To the West」Part 2

It was early morning and I was currently using transfer magic to travel down the highway with Ariane holding onto my shoulder and Ponta on my head. Though I called it a highway, it lacked any sort of pavement, or even laid brick, and was really only a stretch of flatted soil without any trees along it. Before long we came to a fork in the road.

"Ariane-dono, which path leads to Lanbaltic?"

I lacked confidence in my own sense of direction, so I turned to Ariane and asked her what she thought.

However, she only glared at me and questioned me in a blunt tone.

"Arc, I've never heard of the city before, why do you think I would know the roads of a human country?"

She was right of course. Though Lanbaltic was the next town keeping enslaved elves, I had only learned about it back in the capital.

Maps of countries weren't sold in this world, in fact, I've haven't even seen a map since I've come here. I've only found my way around by asking other people for directions.

The information I got in the capital told me to head west until I reached the coastal city of Lanbaltic.

But, in front of me were two paths separated by a group of large boulders. Both paths went in a western direction, but the right one veered northwest while the left one slightly went in the southwestern direction.

Either of the paths carried on towards the west. Because these paths weren't as straight as modern roads I couldn't see far down them. If the one we took led to a steep cliff, then we'd have taken a detour. A detour that would be time-consuming, considering the length of the roads in this era.

Although it'd be preferable to avoid such a detour I could always use transfer magic to return to this spot.

I casually looked around the highway until I found a sturdy looking tree branch on the ground. I picked up the branch, went back to the middle of the road, balanced it on one end and removed the hand keeping it balanced.

Gravity took over immediately as soon as the branch left my hand. When the branch hit the ground it pointed at the northwestern path.

“Well, to the right it is.”

I nodded to myself when a doubtful voice spoke up. It goes without saying that the voice belonged to Ariane. Her eyes stared at me in protest as her cheeks puffed out.

“Wait a minute, is that really a suitable way to pick our path? Are you sure you heard the directions to Lanbaltic correctly back in the capital?”

“I’m sure I heard everything correctly, but I wasn’t told anything about a fork in the road.”

Ariane held her temple as she loudly sighed.

“Don’t you know a more suitable method to decide our path?”

“No, I’m entrusting my fate to the heavens!”

“Hey don’t just entrust my fate to anyone without my permission……”

She bent down to pick up the fallen branch as she protested before she closed her eyes and prepared to speak a prayer.

“Let us ask the spirits to decide on our way…”

After saying a prayer she let the branch fall out of her hands until a hit the ground with a dull sound. The branch was pointing in the same direction it did previously.

“……”

“Hum, so it was the right path after all.”

Ariane seemed dissatisfied with the results but she put her faith in the spirits. She silently placed her hand on my shoulder.

“Well, we can always come back here if it turns out to be the wrong way.”

I started down the right path a little happier that before. I continued to invoke【Dimensional Step】down the not-quite highway in the early morning.

As we advanced I began to notice that the landscape gradually started to change.

The green plains up till now gave way to reddish rocks as the air became dry, and clouds of dust started to be kicked up by the wind.

The forest was soon replaced with a mountain range as a desolate stretch of land opening up on my left side. Vegetation has become sparse and it was getting harder to keep track of the road as it began to mix into the surroundings. I started to look for a village as I began to feel that we’ve gone the wrong way.

My sight was blocked by a sudden gust of wind picking up another cloud of dust.

Ponta tightened her grip on my helmet and let out a cry「Kyun!」Ariane’s and my cloaks were noisily blown around by the gust of wind.

When the wind subdued, I tried to look for the next place to transfer to, but I stopped when I noticed Ariane and Ponta simultaneously reacting to something.

“What’s wrong?”

When I called out to Ariane, she placed her index finger over her lips as her golden eyes

scanned the area. I became restless when I felt Ponta move from atop my head to the back of my neck.

I shut my mouth and began to search the area. I glanced over the mountains and the reddish barren land, but I didn't come across anything to be cautious of.

I thought so until I heard some kind of flapping being carried on the wind.

When I looked in the direction it was coming from, I saw dozens of shadows leaping into the air. Though it was hard to get a clear look from here, I could tell that the shadows were the size of very large birds.

"Wyverns!?"

Ariane glared at the sky and scowled as she saw the shadows leaping into the sky. There were around twenty of the so-called Wyverns in the sky and they were heading right towards us.

Ponta lowered her head and quickly wrapped herself around my neck as if she was a scarf.

"Wyverns huh……"

As they approached I started to get a clear view of them. Although their reptilian bodies were rather small, they had four-meter long wingspans. They also had long necks and bird-like heads. Their skin had the color of yellow ocher with a striped pattern. Their three-meter long tails were used like a rudder to change direction as they flow.

In order words, they were completely different from the Wyverns in the game.

"These Wyverns are different from those I'm used to, I never seem them before…… So Wyverns are active during the day and they fly in flocks……"

Ariane turned her head and groaned.

It seems she knew about these strange Wyverns, and now that I thought about it, it's not all that weird for animals to have different appearances based on the habitat they lived in. It's highly likely that these were a sub-species of Wyvern.

There is something I needed to know first……

"Are these Wyverns strong?"

I looked up at the sky as I asked Ariane that question.

The Wyverns in the game weren't considered all that strong. They were around level 100 and lacked any special attacks.

"Alone, they're nothing much, but when in large groups likes this one…… Arc, it's better if we avoid the hassle and just escape with transfer magic."

Certainly, in a game you'd never be attacked by a horde of this size nor would you be targeted from this far beyond the reach of your sword. In the game, flying enemies like Wyverns only floated a meter above the ground and could be reached even with a short sword.

However, considering the future, I think now is the perfect time to test the extent of my power. I've held out on using some of the flashier skills because they would attract unwanted attention and inconvenience me in a number of ways. But the only ones here were Ariane, Ponta and the flock of Wyverns. It should be alright to be a little flashy here.

"There are a few things I want to try. Ariane-dono, please stay back for a bit."

I took a step forward as I said that and glared at the approaching Wyverns. Ariane started to say something but immediately closed her mouth.

I let go of my luggage sack and prepared for battle.

"【Rock Bullet】!"

I used a basic magic spell for a preliminary test. I began firing fist-sized rock projectiles from the palms of my hands straight into the flock of Wyverns. However the Wyverns, still dozens of meters in the sky, were able to avoid the rocks flying at them easily.

I repeatedly fired the same spell into the sky, but I didn't even graze a single Wyvern. A spell that flew in a straight line was easily evaded by the agile flying Wyverns.

The Wyverns were now flying directly overhead and circled us like vultures waiting for their chance to strike. The only reason they haven't attacked yet was because they were cautious of my constant magic bombardment.

"Well then, can you dodge this?【Lightning Storm】!!"

The atmospheric pressure above the Wyverns rapidly shifted. In the next moment, the air trembled as a deafening roar tore through the area. Blinding flashes of light filled the area as lightning rained down on the Wyverns.

Though it was only a ranged lightning attribute magic of the intermediate wizard class, it was still impressive to see. It was truly a large and flashy magic spell.

When the lightning crossed with the flying Wyverns a few of them started to fall from the sky. However, a little over half of them hadn't been hit.

"Hum, the accuracy isn't all that high……"

The hit ratio of the flashy lightning magic wasn't that high despite the resulting fanfare. As a comparison. if a modern weapon has an accuracy of less than 50%, it is considered defective.

The spell seemed to run on a one-shot system, only offering one or two shots before having to reload slowly. This is a little troubling as the magic indiscriminately attacked anything within a certain range.

However, the Wyverns were frightened by the sudden lightning strikes and scattered.

As I gazed up at the empty sky, Ariane screamed in protest.

“Hey, if you have such powerful magic say so! You scared me half to death!”

When I looked back at Ariane, I saw she was covering her ears and there were tears in the corner of her eyes. I suppose that anyone would be surprised by a sudden and flashy lightning show. Though I didn’t expect it to be so loud, I obediently apologized.

Ponta, who was originally wrapped around my neck, was now licking her forepaws to pat down her fur. Did the spell charge it statically?

“……With such powerful magic, you could do just about anything.”

Ariane sighed half in amazement and half in exhaustion as she looked around. Several of the Wyverns I struck down were all around us.

“I can’t do everything, I just do what I do.”

I spoke a certain phrase I’d heard somewhere else as I approached one of the Wyverns. It was relatively clean, with only a few scorch marks from the lightning strikes.

“Is there any value in these Wyverns?”

I asked Ariane that as I rolled the Wyvern over.

“Yes, the skin can be used to make training armor. The meat is no good, but the magic stone should be usable.”

I understood what she was talking about immediately. In the latter half of the game, Wyvern materials were used in a similar manner.

“Now that you mention it, what kind of leather is your armor made of, Ariane-dono?”

If Wyvern leather was made for trainees, it’s obvious that her equipment would be better than that. I asked her about it out of curiosity.

“It’s a Grand Dragon Leather Armor.”

“Oh, that’s some high-quality material!”

I responded in surprise to her answer. I don’t know if Grand Dragons are the same as the ones in the game, but their high-quality material drops remain the same.

“It’s still nothing compared to your armor.”

Ariane shrugged her shoulders and sighed yet again.

I grabbed a dagger from my luggage sack and inspected the Wyvern on the ground while we chatted.

“Ariane-dono, where is the magic stone located?”

“It should be in the same location as the Wyverns you’re familiar with.”

She pointed her finger a little below the center of the chest. When I cut into the section she pointed at I found a small, purple magic stone.

I cut out the eight remaining stone from the other ones I shot down and placed them in my sack.

“What should we do with the rest of it?”

“Even if we leave them here, won’t the people who want them take them?”

When I pondered on what to do about the Wyverns, Ariane responded to me in a low tone.

Certainly, if the materials could be turned into armor, even if it was just training armor, people would take the Wyverns if they’re just left on the side of the road. Maybe more than one person will want the material.

“You’re right. Let’s get a move on……”

I put my luggage sack over my shoulder as I spoke to Ariane and after a little bit, we continued our trek down the highway with【Dimensional Step】.

Chapter 3:「The wasteland town Buranbeina」

Before long, a town built atop a small hill next to the highway came into view. A stone wall surrounded the town and I could see the roofs of several box-shaped buildings peeking over the wall from here. Unlike other cities I've been to there was almost no decoration to the city, but the impression it gave off was more sturdy than impoverished.

I'd say the town looked more like a fort than anything.

The only patch of greenery in the reddish landscape was around the hill. There was an area of farmland around the town and there were barely any people maintaining it. Compared to the size of the fields, there weren't enough human silhouettes around to properly maintain them.

"Let's stop for a bit and ask for some directions."

"Well, it looks like the road started to lead north before we noticed……"

I didn't really notice until now, but the direction of the road had changed substantially. It was easy to lose sight of your direction when you follow a meandering road without a compass.

Without expressing a bit of my impatience, I turned off the road and headed towards the town.

The town walls were five meters high and made of clean stone, and atop the wall were the figures of guards.

The large front gate was wide open with only a single guard standing watch. When he noticed us the guard straightened his shoulders and stared in our direction.

When we reached the guard I extended my hand to him and began speaking.

"I know it sudden, but there's something I need to ask you. We're trying to get to a city called Lanbaltic, does the highway lead there?"

The guard looked puzzled at my question before turning to Ariane and looking her up and down. Ariane's true form couldn't be seen since she had hidden her face with her cloak's hood.

When he was finished, the guard looked back at me and answered the question.

"No, I've never heard of a place called Lanbaltic around here. Of course, I've never left this town so I only know of nearby villages……"

The guard looked embarrassed by this and started scratch his head.

Even in the modern era, you couldn't simply go to a foreign country and expect to immediately get directions a remote town.

“Hum, we’ll have to ask for directions in town then. How much is the entrance tax?”

I asked the guard that question as I reached for the leather pouch tied to my waist, however, the man just moved aside and urged us to pass.

“There is no entry tax for this town. Not enough people visit such a remote town to make an entrance tax profitable. Oh, but there a small fee for leaving.”

The man chuckled a little and welcomed us inside.

“Welcome to Buranbeina.”

We thanked the guard and set foot inside the town.

Despite being so early in the morning, there were a lot of people inside the city walls, completely different from outside. All the buildings were box-shaped and crowded together. The narrow gaps between the buildings created a complex maze of backstreets and alleyways. Thanks to the pieces of cloth hanging on the multiple clotheslines it was difficult to peer into the depths of the maze.

In the midst of this bustling town, multiple armed men with sleepy looking faces were walking around. Adventures were filtering into their respective inns while people with farming tools were coming out of private residents and heading towards the gate.

After walking against the flow of the crowd for a bit we came across an open marketplace. “Kyun!” After weaving through a group of housewives, Ponta caught the scent of something good and cried out, starting to wag her tail.

Ponta was staring at a street stall that was emitting the savory smell of roasted beans. Though not all that large, the beans looked similar to lentil, which needed to be roasted before eating.

She was probably hungry because she didn’t eat much in the capital. Because Ponta was crying out from atop my head the stall vendor noticed us in the middle of the noisy market and started to laugh.

“Hey, mister. How about it?”

“I’ll take two servings.”

The vendor said “Anytime!” in a booming voice as he took a wooden cup in his hand and scooped the beans into the leather pouch.

When I was about to ask for directions to Lanbaltic the stall owner chimed brought up a topic of his own first.

“Mister, are you here to hunt the Sand Wyverns?”

The question caused me to remember the Wyvern attack for before.

“No, are Sand Wyverns appearing frequently in this area?”

“Oh yes. Recently they’ve started to stray from the wastelands in large numbers and carry off a number of cattle.”

That must have been the Wyverns from before. Though their number must have been nearly halved…… However, instead of an atmosphere of crisis, there were many people walking around the town with smiles on their faces.

“The situation sounds serious, but it doesn’t seem that way……”

When I looked at the surrounding shoppers while speaking, the vendor started to laugh.

“They are sensitive to sunlight, so they usually don’t fly around that much around this time of day. It’s rare for them to attack between daybreak and sundown. Groups of adventurers have come here in pursuit of Sand Wyvern leather……”

“Ho, for a shopkeeper you seem well informed about monsters.”

When I offered him a compliment, the vendor waved it off and handed over two pouches of beans while laughing.

“A monster researcher just happens to live in this town, that’s all. Thanks to his guidance the damage done to the town has been minimized. Ah, that’ll be three sok.”

“Such a talented person live here-, oh, I only have silver coins.”

I handed over a silver coin. The vendor handed me seven copper coins as change before resuming the conversation in a lower tone.

“Furthermore, the researcher is one of those rarely seen elves.”

Ariane stepped forward when she heard that.

“There’s an elf living in a human town!?”

Even she was surprised by her outburst as she had to hold down her hood and look down to prevent her eyes and mouth from being exposed.

“Y-Yes. The feudal lord prepared a special house for him and he’s been living here for ten years or so.”

The vendor had been surprised by the seemingly calm person’s sudden shout, but he managed to answer the question.

“Where would the elf researcher’s residence happen to be?”

Since that was what Ariane wanted to know the most I asked the vendor about it.

“Well, it’s right beside the lord’s mansion and is heavily guarded, so you can’t carelessly go there, you know?”

“What, I was just asking out of curiosity. Anyway, you wouldn’t happen to know the way to Lanbaltic, would you?”

The vendor looked doubtful when I asked about our original purpose, but after thinking it over for a bit he and called out to the older vendor.

“Old man, you said that you were a peddler in your youth right? You know anything?”

The old man with a stubby beard looked in our direction as he smoked a pipe.

“To get to Lanbaltic from here you need to head west from the Hibotto wastelands. The Leving mountains should come into view west of the wasteland.”

The man spoke in a leisurely manner while he puffed smoke into the air. If he was telling the truth, then we’ve taken the wrong path. The southwestern path at the fork in the road was probably the correct one.

We thanked the two vendors and left. I poured some of the roasted beans in my hand, causing Ponta to smoothly leap from my head and start stuffing her face.

“What do you want to do, Ariane-dono?”

When I looked back into Ariane’s eyes I saw that she hesitated for a moment. She looked up to reply…… but I already know what she would say.

“I would like to meet with this elf researcher.”

I nodded at the expected response.

It was said that the researcher was living under the protection of the lord, but elves were often the target of slavery in human society. So this situation seemed a little unbelievable.

Based on what the vendor said, it seems that the researcher was being held captive in this town.

Since the elf’s house was located right beside the lord’s mansion and that the people know of its existence we began to ask around a bit as we slowly approached the mansion

I heard that whenever the elf came to town for a bite to eat, he would be surrounded by a team of guards. They were probably a protective measure against outlandish individuals.

However, there were also stories of the elf researcher pacifying drunken adventures that acted violently.

At the center of the town, I was able to catch a glimpse of a spectacular rectangular building that was surrounded by a large wall.

The researcher was said to be living in a house on the feudal lord's property. There was a portcullis attached to the gate and four guards were standing outside to keep watch.

I doubted that we could easily break through the front, but I was also hesitating about trying to sneak in. This was a little different from our usual situation.

For the time being, let's just walk up to the gate.

The four guards were instantly alarmed when they saw us heading straight towards them. The guards moved into a semicircle formation and raised their spears against us to block our path. It would be impossible to not be suspicious of a knight that stood over two meters tall with a green fox on his head and a cloaked woman whose face was completely covered.

"Excuses me, we'd like to have a word with the elf that is said to live here……"

The guards' tension rose another notch when they heard me speak.

"No one is allowed to meet with Casey-dono without an appointment. You should leave right now."

The blunt response of the guard could be considered normal given the circumstances. I looked over my shoulder to Ariane to see what she'd do.

She apparently thought that talking would be a waste of time considering the way the discussion was going, and stepped in front of the guards placing her hands on her hood.

"I am a messenger from the Great Canada Forest and I wish to see Casey-dono!"

She threw off her hood and revealed her pointed ears, snow white hair and lilac skin. As she stared them down with her golden eyes framed by her sharp lashes, the four guards silently stood there with gaping mouths.

Another guard appeared from inside the building. His equipment was a bit better and he was in good shape considering his apparently advanced age. Raising his voice he started yelling at the guards to get them moving again.

"Oiii, you stupid lot! Go report this to the lord and Casey-dono!"

The guards finally regained their motor functions and two of them quickly set off to deliver the message, even tripping along the way.

"Please follow me while the lord is informed of your arrival."

The elderly man, who seemed to be the captain of the guard, led us inside the walls and offered us a seat on the guard station's sofa as we waited.

To pass the time while we wait I began to pour the lentils I bought into my hand for Ponta to eat with great relish.

Soon the messenger returned and offered the guard captain a salute before speaking.

“Casey-dono is willing to meet with them!”

The captain nodded in response and the guard immediately left.

Somehow we were able to gain a meeting with the rumored elf researcher. But I couldn’t help but feel a little depressed seeing as I might have to interact with a feudal lord.

“I’ll lead the way.”

At the captain’s words, Ariane and I, along with two other guards, followed his lead.

Chapter 4:「Monster Researcher」Part 1

There was a building located on the side of the mansion's courtyard. After leaving the guard station, we entered a corridor that connected the buildings to one another. We were now in front of the two-story tall, box-shaped building. Though it looked small compared to the surrounding buildings, it was still slightly larger than the houses in town.

There was an elegantly designed door knocker attached to the simple wooden door, and when the captain knocked on it a man's voice was heard from within.

"It's open〜"

In contrast to Ariane's and my tension, the voice was rather relaxed and the captain paid it no mind as he opened the door.

"Excuse me."

The captain opened the door and stepped aside after accepting the invite, allowing Ariane to enter first. I followed suit and the two guards were right behind me.

Thick wooden pillars lined the sides of the first floor, the centerpiece of the room being a large table. There were chaise lounges and armchairs on both sides of the room. The fact that they were rarely used, coupled with the bare stone floor, resulted in a slightly bleak atmosphere.

Once he entered, the captain walked in front of the group and led us to a back room that was on the other side of the table.

The back room was an utter mess.

Multiple books, parchments, and rolled up scrolls were hastily piled atop the table in the center of the room. There were many bookshelves arranged along the wall, but they were already filled to the brim with more scrolls and books. The room's carpet was woven with beautiful patterns, but they were mostly covered by rocks and the fangs and tusk of various types of animals.

There was a large glass window at the back of the room and a man was sitting with his back to us at a crooked work desk.

"We've brought the messenger from Canada."

"Ahh, thank you."

The captain offered his salute to the man's back before turning around and leaving the room.

"I never imaged that a messenger from Canada would come for me〜, welcome to my humble abode."

The man stood up as he voiced his greeting.

His unkempt blonde hair was tinged green, he had the characteristic long ears of the elves, and his emerald green eyes could be seen from behind a pair of round glasses.

Instead of the traditional clothing of the elves, he had opted to wear similar clothes as the general public, but they were in shabby condition.

“I’m Ariane Glenys Maple. Nice to meet you……, Casey?”

“A warrior from Maple? Wonderful, I’m Casey Held, you can just call me Casey Ariane-kun. How about you mister knight……Ohh!! A vento vulpix!!”

Casey’s eyes bulged in surprise when he heard Ariane’s name and he turned to ask me my name. However, when he saw Ponta sitting on my head, he rushed towards me and uttered

an excited cry.

“My name is Arc, something of Ariane-done’s companion. This fluffy fox here is Ponta.”

“Ky〜un……”

With how much Casey honed in on her, I understood why Ponta edged back on my helmet.

“A travelling companion? Since elves never walk around in such armor, are you by any chance a human?”

I nodded in affirmation to the puzzled Casey. His puzzlement quickly changed to astonishment as he began to give all of us a proper once over.

“I have to say that this is a rare combination of individuals. Especially seeing a human that managed to tame a spirit beast.”

Casey extended his hand to Ponta with a smile on his face, however, she wrapped herself around my neck to escape. When he saw this Casey lowered his head in regret and forced out a feeble laugh.

“How nostalgic to see a tamed spirit beast…… Oh, where are my manners, please take a seat.”

When he noticed that we were still standing, Casey cleared a pile of items from a chair and urged us to sit. However, since there was only one chair, I let Ariane take it while I simply stood behind her.

“So is there really a message from my village?”

Casey sat in his own chair and pushed up his glasses with his middle finger as he asked his question. Judging from his tone he must have already grasp the situation to some extent.

“No, we are in the middle of rescuing our enslaved brethren from the humans. We were just passing through on our way to Lanbaltic when……”

“You heard that there was an elf living in this town and decided to check it out. Also, you two are heading the wrong way if you’re trying to reach Lanbaltic.”

When she nodded at his assessment Casey stated to laugh, causing Ariane to look back at me. I didn’t really have anything to say, but I had to do something.

“Casey-dono, you seem to be doing well for yourself in this human town.”

Ariane’s gaze returned to the glasses wearing elf in front of her. Casey took a look around the room before he started speaking in a hearty tone.

“Has it already been ten years since I settled here? I left my village about forty years ago and I wandered from place to place concealing my identity. I think that this country is far

better than the others I've been to."

"Ten years, huh… that's quite a long time to live here."

"It may seem that way to human, but for us it about the same as a year or two. I won't say that it's been that long…… also this is a convenient place to live in for my research, a variety of monsters appear around the Calcutta mountains in the east and beyond the Hiboto wastelands in the west."

He followed up his explanation by saying "Those areas aren't suitable to live in" while laughing a pushing up his glasses.

"Why do you live in a human town though?"

Ariane probably asked Casey the question she most wanted answered.

Even I could tell that she didn't have a lot of faith in humans, her contract with me was only for the sake of her mission. It wasn't hard to imagine her shock at finding an elf openly living under the protection of the humans in this town.

"I obviously hid my identity when I first came here. However, this town's feudal lord took an interest in my monster research…… My identity as an elf was revealed after I was invited the mansion and I've been allowed to live here as a special guest since. I offered them my findings on the ecology of this area's monsters and allowed them to publish a book based on it. Well I pretty much did the same thing back in my village."

When I looked around the room, I noticed the abundant amount of monster sketches, catalogs, and memos scattered about.

The books and documents that were packed into the book shelves were probably all related to monsters as while.

I also noticed that Ariane was making a complicated expression.

"Currently I'm investigating Sandworms that live in Hiboto, but since they live mostly underground it's hard to get a good view of them. Moreover, they are quite formidable enemies……"

As he was going on about his research Casey suddenly stopped talking and took a step towards Ariane before shouting.

"That's right! I was thinking of capturing a live Sandworm, how about you help me? Surely a warrior from Maple will have enough skill to accompany me……"

"Umm, we still have our own mission to complete……"

Ariane quickly offered a vague refusal to Casey's enthusiastic request to help in monster hunting. Since it was a request from another elf, I'd thought that Ariane would hear him out,

but I was left staring at her in surprise.

"……Warriors not only train their magic and swordsmanship, they also study monster ecology for the sake of the village. Your books and research on monsters only teach humans how to fight them off."

Her golden eyes were focused on Casey as she said that.

I could understand what she was trying to say with that comment. She was calling him an elf that valued humans above his own kind.

Casey smiled bitterly as he sunk back into his chair.

"The books on monster ecology that you studied were most likely made by me before I left my village.

"In that case, that's all the more-"

"Sooner or later, someone will have to research the ecology of monsters. I believe it is my duty as an elf to fulfill this important role."

Just as she was about to continue her argument, Casey looked Ariane in the eye and shot her down.

But I could understand his argument as well. Thanks to his research, the damage monsters inflicted on this town had been reduced, a feat that could only benefit the elves. If the human's view on elves changed then it could only benefit the elves.

However, it was a long road ahead, considering that he had to live next to the feudal lord's mansion and was constantly surrounded by guards.

"Like I said before, this country is better than other ones. The feudal lord's treatment of me if proof of that. Canada and Rhoden are neighbors. In the future, we can either feud with one another or make peace with each other, and I for one choose to make peace."

Casey paused for a moment to pushed his glasses before he started speaking again.

"The person behind you is a human right?"

Ariane face had a complicated expression as she looked at me over her shoulder.

I had told them I was human myself, so she couldn't deny it. However, my current appearance was that of an undead, a person who is considered cursed in this world.

Once more I had this feeling that I had forgotten something important—

As I tried to think about this, I suddenly felt someone's gaze on my face. Ariane's beautiful golden eyes were prompting me to say something.

“Call it a form of divine guidance if you will. I will simply trust Ariane-dono’s judgment for now.”

We were only here because of my poor sense of direction, and Ariane had muttered something about ‘Spirit Divination’ and invited an unseen force to direct us… so I was able to ignore my own faults.

“You will be rewarded for your help. I don’t have much money, but maybe I can offer you some of my research instead? I can pay you with these two volumes of my monster research from when I left my village. I believe that those of my village should learn of the world beyond it, after all.”

Casey pulled out two thick books from his collection as he spoke. The books were bound in leather and had the illustration of a dragon etched into their covers. Below said illustrations, the name「Casey Held」was written.

When he opened one of the books it revealed an abundance of carefully drawn monster illustrations, followed by things such as living habitats and the species’ characteristics. I’ve loved picture books since I was a kid, so I was a little excited seeing these books.

“I can also offer you something not intended for human eyes, an encyclopedia of the various spirit beasts I’ve encountered. Unfortunately it isn’t as detailed as my research on monsters. The difficulties in approaching spirit beasts has hindered any in-depth investigation……”

Casey smiled bitterly as he scratched head and held out another book. It wasn’t as thick as the books on monsters and it was bound rather roughly.

Since he was concerned about the spirit beast, he probably choose to not share this with humans. There was a chance more cases like Ponta’s might occur after all.

But as he said, it was bound to happen sooner or later.

“I understand, but we can’t afford to waste too much time……”

Ariane looked directly at Casey as she said that in a firm tone.

Chapter 5:「Monster Researcher」Part 2

Casey lead us through the corridor that connected to the mansion. He nodded at the feudal lord's guards and servants as we passed them by. Occasionally a gaze would linger on the dark elf Ariane but they wouldn't stay long enough for it to be considered rude.

The large central building we found ourselves at was probably feudal lord's residence. When Casey said hello to the guards that stationed in front of the large main door, they silently opened the door.。

Casey thanked them as he passed through the door, but when I tried to follow him one of the guards blocked my way.

"I'm sorry, you have to leave your weapons here."

The『Sword of the Lion King』and the two-handed『Holy Thunder Sword』hung on Ariane's and my waist respectively. Seem like we wouldn't be able to carry our weapons into the feudal lord's residence.

I would feel a little uneasy with my weapon out of reach, but it wouldn't help even if I complained. I silently nodded and held my sheathed sword out to the guard. Ariane also offered her sword in the same manner.

The guard's admiration of my sword lasted until he tried to take it. When I let go of the sword, the guard immediately lost his balance and staggered.

"Ku! H-Heavy……"

The guard struggled to lift the sword that I could easily wield.

"Are you alright?"

"S-Sorry."

The sword lacked any feeling of weight when I used it, but it would be difficult for normal people to swing. I was able to relax a little when I had that thought. Even if someone had such a powerful weapon, they weren't much of a threat if they couldn't use it.

Since we had the guards' permission, we passed through the same door that Casey had. Ahead, we saw him talking to a female servant in the main hall.

"Casey-dono? How can I help you today?"

"Ah, is Sukitosu-kun in the usual room? I could use a good guide."

The woman briskly started walking up the main stairway to the second floor. When Ariane and I tried the keep pace as we followed, the woman's eyes bulged in surprise.

"Huh!? Casey-dono you have to say so beforehand when you have guests!"

Right before we followed Casey up the stairs, in her haste to greet us the women tripped on and started to fall right in front of us.

Ariane moved immediately. Without a sound, she approached the falling woman as caught her.

“Are you alright?”

“S-Sorry, honorable guest.”

When Ariane looked at the woman with her golden eyes, she blushed and quickly separated herself from Ariane.

“Casey-dono! Please wait!!”

In order to hide her embarrassment, the woman quickly ran up the stairs and called out for Casey.

“Brita-kun don’t be so mad.”

“Do you wanna take my scolding!?”

“Is Sukitosu-kun really gonna be upset over such a thing?”

“I’m gonna be scolded by the head maid!”

When we reached to top of the stairs, the woman name Brita caught up with Casey and was arguing with him. She was still blushing as she led the laughing Casey to his destination.

This scene must have been a common occurrence since the guards and servants they passed by wryly smiled at the two.

Ariane was slightly amused by the exchange as we followed behind the two of them.

“Hey, I’m coming in. Sukitosu-kun.”

In the depths of the mansion, Casey opened a remarkably beautiful door without knocking. It was the maid Brita that stepped in, while at her wits end, who said “Excuse us.” to the person inside.

Ariane and I share a look between each other and then back at those two before entering the room.

“You, I thought that you were entertaining an elven guest? Did you decide to come here when your talk was over……”

In this small rectangular room, there were bookcases displayed on both sides while the furniture was neatly arranged throughout the room. There was large glass window in the back with an ebony-colored worked carefully centered in front of it.

A man that was in the prime of his life was sitting at that desk and had been going over a document in his hand before he looked up at Casey and Brita's entrance.

Casey had called the man in the prime of his life "Sukitosu-kun." He was about 40 years old, his dark hair was cut short, and although he was dressed in fine clothing from what I could see, his upper body was highly toned. That combined with the stubble on his chin made the man look more like a veteran adventurer than a noble.

Lord Sukitosu looked surprised when he saw Ariane and I enter the room before shaking his head and looking back at Casey.

"Actually, we have agreed upon securing the Sandworm sample I've been talking about."

Sukitosu turned his head at the relaxed Casey's laid back explanation.

"Didn't you give up on that? Haven't I already said that you're trying to take the soldier too far from the town? Though the fields were expanded thanks to you, there aren't enough people to spare. Even if you only need a few people I can only offer you three or four at most."

Sukitosu signed and messaged the wrinkles on his forehead, but Casey simply called out to Ariane and me with a joyous expression.

"It all right! These two are willing to cooperate this time. The messenger from my village Ariane-dono and the one wearing the armor—"

"This is my personal guard, Arc."

Ariane glanced in my direction after cutting into Casey's introduction. I offered the two a small nod in response with that short introduction.

I wonder if she used that as an excuse for me to keep my helmet own. After all, there was little that could be said about the personal guard of an important elven messenger. I don't know if the concept of diplomatic immunity existed in this world, but I'm not foolish enough to point that out.

However, the man in front of us didn't seem to mind the small things.

"You're not being coerced into this are you, Messenger-san?"

Sukitosu leaned back in his chair to look up at the ceiling and sighed, before turning his sympathetic eyes on us and asked that question.

"I didn't coerce anybody, we performed a fair trade, didn't we?"

While Casey was pleading his case, Brita deeply bowed her head in apology behind him.

"Well Sukitosu-kun, could you please loan me four people that can manage the bait?"

“You mean those goblins you’ve been saving…… I’ll lend you the men if you dispose of them. I’ve been getting complaints about the foul odor they give off for the last five days.”

Sukitosu made a dismissive gesture to Casey before looking in our direction and standing up.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Ariane-dono. I am Sukitosu Du Buranbeina, this town’s feudal lord, but you can just call me Sukitosu. Since this is such an out of the way place, I ask that you excuse my bad manners.”

“I am Ariane Glenys Maple, and I don’t really mind.”

When Sukitosu offered his right hand, Ariane took it. There must have been something special about Ariane’s skin as Sukitosu looked down at their combined hand in surprise before quickly looking away.

“Then…… I’ll prepare a seat at the table for tonig—”

“No thank you, since we don’t have a lot of time to spare, we’ll be leaving once we are done helping with this matter……”

Just as Sukitosu was offering us a seat at dinner, Ariane immediately declined the offer. Again, thanks to my condition, even if we attended the meal I would have had to stand behind Ariane the entire time.

“That so? There is no need for you to refuse…… but I suppose that a messenger is always busy. Thank you in advance for helping Casey-dono.”

Sukitosu tried not to scowl as he said that and put on a false smile while turning in Casey’s direction.

“Ah? Where did he go?

When Sukitosu couldn’t find Casey he frantically started to look around for him.

“He left some time ago in high spirits.”

“Again……”

Brita resigned herself to go looking for him, while Sukitosu apologetically looked towards Ariane.

As she stared at the feudal lord, Ariane slowly opened her mouth.

“Why would a feudal lord such as yourself take in an elf?”

For a moment, Sukitosu looked as if he didn’t know how to respond, but he immediately started to smile.

“He is a truly talented researcher. About ten years ago, the constant monster attacks had

put this land on the brink of collapse. After he came and taught my guards the various characteristics of the monsters that inhabited the area, the town was able to become livable again. My territory's people and I are truly grateful to him……"

I see, Casey had appeared in this place's time of need and the two of them built up mutual trust from that point on.

Ariane must have realized that fact herself as she listened to the story without interruption.

When Ariane prepared to leave the room Sukitosu said "Come by anytime." with a smile and a chuckle. Though the town wasn't that large, its feudal lord left the impression of a good mayor in my mind.

When we retrieved our weapons at the entrance, we were told that Casey had asked us to be brought to a warehouse on the propriety.

There wasn't anything particularly special about the building, it being nothing more than a bow with a small window. However, a horrid smell was spewing from the warehouse's opened double door.

The smell became even worse as I looked inside and Ariane's face unconsciously distorted into a scowl. Ponta must not have minded the smell that much because she was wagging her tail as usual. There was only one wagon in this deserted warehouse, so naturally, the person looking over its contents noticed its use.

There were ten green-skinned dwarves laying in the wagon and they were all giving off the strong scent of decay.

"A horde of goblins were recently chased out of their territory by wyverns, so they tried to raid the city. I intend to use these corpses as bait for the Sandworm.

"Casey-dono, when will we hunt the Sandworm?"

Ariane had tears in her eyes and was holding her nose beside me as she asked her question.

"Sand Worms are nocturnal monsters, so I assume we can set off after lunch. Oh, do you guys have something to eat for lunch? There's a pretty good place in town called Oak."

When I turned back to Ariane I saw that she was holding her noses as she shocks her head no. Since I couldn't eat in the open and I really didn't feel like standing around that Oak place watching other people eat.

Casey looked a little disappointed at her answer before turning to me.

"No, I'll decline as well."

"Is that so? That's too bad, the food is really delicious."

Casey pouted a bit before looking back at the decomposing goblins and starting to put

together as schedule in his head.

“Well then, how about you guys return here a little bit after noon? You can explore the town till then.”

We parted ways with Casey at that and headed back into town.

Chapter 6:「The ones you're with」

All the townspeople were watching us as walked by. Ariane was currently walking down the street without her hood on and her face completely exposed. Her well arranged features, golden eyes, and the lilac skin peeking through her cloak would naturally catch everyone's eye.

"It's so strange, for an elf to live openly in a town of untrustworthy humans……"

She looked at the town's residents while saying that. Once she put her gray hood on, the number of eyes watching us began to decrease.

"Ariane-dono, we should book a room at an inn for the night."

"Why? We can set out for Lanbaltic once we capture the Sandworm, right?"

Ariane looked puzzled as she said that.

"Let's say that it takes until midnight to capture the Sandworm, then we'd have to stay overnight, wouldn't we?"

"I see what you mean…… Also, sorry for my selfishness……"

She must have remembered our talk with Casey because she abruptly apologized.

"Ariane-dono, since you're my employer I have the duty to comply with your wishes as much as possible. Besides, the best part of a journey are the detours."

"……Thank you."

She offered me a small thanks as she turned away and headed towards the inn district at a brisk pace. I widened my stride to keep pace with her.

There weren't many inns to begin with, and most of the larger ones were occupied by the adventurers, so the two of us had to book a double room in a small inn for the night.

According to the owner of the inn the highway that passed this town didn't see much traffic, so it was rare for anyone other than adventurers who were searching for monster materials to visit.

After booking our room, Ariane and I toured the city until the sun rose to the middle of the sky.

This time, when Ariane and I were approaching the guards, they quietly allowed us to carry on. However, before we reached the gate, Casey opened it and immediately came out.

A large four-horse wagon was behind him, with one person in the coachman's seat and three other men in light armor following it. Everyone but Casey was covering their faces with a cloth which made them look like robbers out of a western.

Dried grass had been piled atop the decomposing goblin corpses in an attempt to block their foul smell, but the smell was still leaking out and the guards scowled whenever it reached them.

“Yaa, let’s depart.”

Casey was the only one unaffected by the smell as he cheerfully started to lead the wagon along. After a brief talk with two city guards we left the town and headed towards the highway.

After reaching the highway, we turned north. After a bit of traveling, we turned west and headed into the wasteland.

Casey had been teaching us about Sandworms throughout the entire journey. Sandworms apparently burrowed deep underground during the day and searched for food during the night. The reason we brought the goblin-corpses along was that they mostly ate dead flesh.

Their weak point was fire, but their skin was able to resist fire to a certain point. However, since we would risk burning the body of the specimen we were trying to collect, it had been decided to avoid using fire magic.

“I know of Soilworms, can’t you simply cut off their heads to kill them?”

“Soilworms that live in the forest are about three meters long, but Sandworms are twenty meters long. Their girth is so big that a fully grown adult can barely wrap his arms around them, and their elasticity makes it near impossible to decapitate them, even with a good sword. On top of possessing amazing strength, they retreat into the ground the moment they detect danger, which makes it difficult to defeat them..”

Casey answered Ariane’s question with a troubled expression.

Still, a twenty-meter long worm is quite the monster. However, if they’re only as wide as an adult’s arm-span, I should be able to cut them with the『Holy Thunder Sword』. I wonder if it’d be possible to test it out with another Sandworm after this.

After a while, the ground began to soften and Casey soon looked back and signaled for the wagon to stop advancing.

“Okay, this place is good enough. Let’s scatter the bait around the area, then hide the wagon in the shadow of a rock formation and wait in it until nightfall.

As he showed the men where to place the bait, I spotted a large rock formation bursting from the red colored, barren wasteland. No one would notice if a wagon and a group of people were hidden behind that large rock formation.

Following Casey’s instructions the guards used their spears to stab the goblins before carrying them to the designated locations. It was a task that made everybody scowl.

Once the bait was set, we moved behind the rocks and started to chat while waiting for nightfall. Ponta curled up on Ariane's knees and it wasn't long before I could hear her light snoring.

The guards took turns poking their heads out from behind the rocks while Casey was writing down the description of a nearby growing plant on a piece of parchment

As the sun started to set, the shrubs that managed to grow in the discolored soil were dyed in an orange hue as far as the eye could see. The shadows of the rock formations began to stretch along the wasteland. While the temperature was gradually falling, Casey's tension only seem to rise. Even the guards were smiling wryly while Casey repeatedly poked his head out from behind the rock as he became more and more restless.

Eventually, a pair of flying monsters that we weren't here for started flying in our direction with the sun at their backs. They had figures that I recognized. With their bird-like head and four-meter-long wing span, there was no doubt these monsters were Sand Wyverns like those from this morning.

When the sound of their flapping wings could be heard, Ponta leaped from Ariane's knees and wrapped herself around Ariane's neck, who simply grinned in delight at the situation.

"Sand Wyverns have arrived. They don't usually consume corpses."

Casey was muttering something as he peeked from behind the rock to stare at the Wyverns that had landed in the area with the bait.

The two Sand Wyverns slowly approached the unattended goblins and began to peck at it like birds. However, one of them quickly lifted its head and cautiously looked around before taking to the skies. The other one must have been crazy about the goblin as it tried to take another peck when something suddenly shot out of the ground. The Wyvern shouted as it was dragged underground.

As if that were the signal, other large figures began to burst from the ground one after another. Their skin was a mossy green with a darkish yellow mixed in, and four flaps pulled back to reveal their mouths, each lined with an uncountable amount of fangs. Wiggling around in search of their prey, we could see some sand blowing out of gill-like organs that were a short distance under their mouth and a myriad of centipede-like legs were lining their stomachs.

Though only a section of their bodies was above ground, they easily exceeded five meters as they approached the rotten goblins we had set as bait. There were five of them in total.

"Arya～, I never imaged that so many of them would come out…… It would be completely suicidal to try challenging this many Sandworms.

Casey's voice was tinged with a hint of disappointment as he looked upon this spectacle.

"Aren't Sandworms only suppose to eat corpses? They had no hesitations preying on the

Wyvern."

"I said they usually ate corpses, I never said they didn't eat living beings."

Casey focused on the Sandworms as he answered one of the guard's question. If that's the case then couldn't humans be their prey as well?

I could probably kill this many if I used magic, but I wondered if it was alright to take such conspicuous actions here.

Since there were five large Sandworms, there obviously weren't enough goblins to go around, so one of them was driven away from the bait.

The one that had been driven away suddenly noticed something and turned it's head in our direction. It drove its head back underground before the earth began to part, indicating that it was heading towards us.

"Uhyua!!"

One of the guards screamed in terror as he saw the approaching worm and started to run toward the highway.

As if it had a periscope underground, the worm changed direction and started to chase after the guard that ran.

"Che, as if!"

I shot out from behind the formation in the same way and recklessly chased after the guard with my strong legs. By the time I caught up to him, the Sandworm had emerged from the ground with its fangs out, ready to consume its prey. Without enough time to draw my sword, I tackled the large Sandworm head on.

I grabbed hold of the Sandworm around its gills and stopped its charge with pure strength. It immediately started trying to wiggle out of my hold while it's mouth hung open like an alien egg. I could hear a harsh "GICHICHI" as the beast twisted its large body in an attempt to break free of my hold, forcing me to increase the strength I used accordingly.

"Haaaaa!!"

The guard was unable to stand and quickly started to scuttle back on his butt. I could see traces of wetness between his crotch. I wonder if this monster has some kind of heightened sense of smell.

The Sandworm arched its body in an attempt to sink back underground and once again writhed in my arms. This twenty-meter long monster had a considerable amount of power, I had to crouch down in a desperate attempt to keep the worm's head above ground.

"Hahhhhhh!!!"

If the Sandworm dove underground then it would be in its home-field. I took the initiative and started to pull the worm out of the ground like a radish. However, the opponent desperately tried to avoid certain death and engaged me in tug-a-war. However, the large body of the Sandworm gradually started to pile into a wiggling mass as I pulled it out of the ground.

The Sandworm flailed about as opened its mouth in an attempt to bite at my chest. I immobilized its body by holding it down with my foot and tightened my grip into a sleeper hold.

"Arc!"

Ariane rushed towards Sandworm and was waiting for her chance to strike with her sword in hand.

"It's alright, Ariane-dono! Everything's going great!"

I informed Ariane of my safety to prevent her from dealing a fatal blow to the Sandworm while applying more pressure to the hold. Before long the Sandworm began to feebly convulse as I applied a sleeper hold from a better posture.

The movements of the struggling upper and lower halves dimmed just like the remaining light in the wastelands as the chokehold started to take effect.

"No way, no way, no way… it's impossible for a person to strangle a Sandworm with their bare hands……"

Casey said that as he and the rest of the guards approached. While keeping an eye on the behemoth on the ground, the group walked towards me. As the remaining guards ran up and were at a loss for words as they stared at me in a wide circle.

A pointless discussion began in my head about how counterproductive it was to avoid using flashy magic in an attempt to be inconspicuous, only to defeat a monster with superhuman strength. No, it was already too late for being inconspicuous.

I stood up while brushing off the dust from my cloak and armor, trying to act as if nothing happened.

Looking back at the area we had placed the bait, I saw that the Sand Worms and goblins were already gone, leaving only a barren wasteland behind.

"Casey-dono, I assume that the sample collection is complete?"

When I looked back at the worm at my feet, Casey was already moving around and prodding the large creature.

"It's sufficient! I never expected to be able to collect such a beautiful specimen."

Casey was brimming with joy as he spoke in a slightly exciting tone.

“Casey-dono, the sun will be setting soon. If we don’t move the specimen immediately will run the risk of being attacked by Sand Wyverns.”

One of the guards was voicing their concerns to Casey after looking at the sky. The guard who had been chased was being helped by another guard.

The sun was already hidden behind the mountain range in the distance and the sky was already a dark indigo color.

“Is that so, I had assumed that we would have to camp out, but things were wrapped up rather quickly.”

Following Casey’s instructions, the Sandworm was loaded onto the wagon. Once the worm’s large body was loaded up we set off immediately.

“Recently a group of Sand Wyverns has been appearing around town.”

On the way back to Buranbeina, Casey informed us of that fact as the guards walking beside the wagon nervously surveyed the sky.

“We encountered a few of them on our way to Buranbeina. They flow off after we struck a couple of them down.”

“Is that true!? Could you tell me where they are, so that Sukitosu-kun can send a team to recover them?”

Since Ariane and I had no particular use for them, we nodded and gave him the location of the bodies.

Before long we neared the hill that Buranbeina was built upon. The guards’ tension began to ease once we were in the reach of the city lights. The town gates had already been closed, but when Casey walked in front of the guards on duty they were opened once again.

“Casey-done, we’ll take our leave here.”

After entering the town, I called out to him in the town square. Casey looked back at us before grabbing a cloth bundle from the wagon and walked back to us.

“Today was a wonderful day. Here are the books I promised as a reward. I’m grateful that they will be useful to those of my village. Hopefully, these will inspire some of our brethren to look beyond the village.”

He handed Ariane the bundle and held out his right hand. She stretched out her own hand and shook his.

“Thank you very much. You should be more selective of the people you allow to read these.”

Hearing Ariane's words, Casey just smiled and waved a friendly farewell before following the wagon to the feudal lord's mansion.

"I guess we should get some rest……"

"……Alright."

After watching Casey's back disappear, we turned around and headed towards our inn.

Chapter 7:「Harbor City Lanbaltic」Part 1

Making full use of【Dimensional Step】, Ariane and I left Buranbeina early the next morning and returned to the fork in the road.

Under the sunny sky, Ponta was chasing butterflies around the rocks at the center of the fork in the road.

Ariane was sitting on a boulder of to the side and drinking water from her canteen.

I was sitting on the ground waving a foxtail grass blade around, failing to catch Ponta's attention as she wagged her tail and avoided eye contact.

Unable to heal my loneliness, I turned my eyes to the gentle hills that opened up before me.

Far west of the hilly landscape, the ridgeline of the Leving mountains continued from the northern and southern horizons.

Our next destination, Lanbaltic, was just beyond that mountain range. Based off of what we heard in Buranbeina, we'd have to travel around the southernmost tip of the mountains to reach the city. From this vantage point, I should easily be able to cover the distance with transfer magic, but the problem was that the monsters roaming the area, the high amount of pedestrian traffic, and the villages along the way made doing so rather difficult. I sighed unintentionally as I stared out at the surrounding area.

"We should set off soon."

"Yeah."

Ariane agreed with my opinion as she stood up. Ponta, seeming to realize what was happening and used her magic to fly from the rock she was on to the top of my head. Facing forward I put my luggage sack over my shoulder and began to walk.

I headed down the southwestern path this time. Confirming that there was no one around, I invoked【Dimensional Step】. Occasionally we would come across some people on the highway so I had to transfer to another location. We traveled like this for quite some time and it wasn't long before night fell.

Silence had fallen over the hilly landscape and the Leving mountains looked larger at their base than when I gazed at them from our previous vantage point. I couldn't even see the setting sun since it was blocked by the northern region of the mountain range.

We decided to rest for the night and visited the inn of a small town that was built next to a forest.

Unfortunately, the next day the sky was full of dark clouds.

After leaving the town and following the western highway early in the morning, the hilly

surroundings were eventually replaced by an ocean view. Although it had taken a rather gloomy appearance thanks to the cloudy sky, my feelings brightened up a little.

"We've finally reached the ocean."

I put my hands on my waist and took a deep breath. Ponta used her magic to fly from the top of my head to a hill that overlooked the sea.

"This is the first time I've seen the ocean from this side."

Ariane smiled as she removed her hood, letting her silver hair blow in the wind, and spoke in an emotional tone.

"We have to head north along the coast from here."

I turned away from the sea to look in the northern direction.

Even though I didn't know how much further north we had to go, at our pace we should've been able to reach Lanbaltic by the afternoon. The problem was that because of the people and the coastal villages and towns along the highway, I couldn't recklessly use【Dimensional Step】here.

Moving away from the highway, I began to use【Dimensional Step】, checking to make sure the coast was clear each time. Our speed fell as a result, but it was still faster than walking would have been.

Apparently by trying to avoid being seen, you increase the probability of encountering those you didn't want to see you.

At one point the northern highway dipped into a slight incline in between a set of hills, and at the center of the incline, a group of people was gathered. Wait, it was a handful of people surrounded by another group of people and every one of them had their weapons drawn.

The ones surrounded were a group of five seemingly young adventurers, who were all wearing cheap leather armor and carrying a sword and shield.

One the other hand, the ten men that surrounded them were dressed in various garbs from leather armor and cloaks to old rags and they held their weapons as if they were waiting for the right moment to attack. They were looking like mercenaries or thieves, but it was hard to tell.

Based on their demeanor and attitude, the five adventurers were novices and the group that surrounded them were veterans. One of the bandits had a slight smile on his face as he appraised the equipment.

Ariane's golden eyes peeked out from beneath her hood and asked me a question with her gaze.

We could completely ignore this situation or get involved.

We could transfer to the next hill from here and carry on, and I'm certain I'd feel very little about this situation as we continued on. Why is it that I leap in to help women and children who are under attack, but consider the prospect of helping shabby men a hassle? Silver: (Because you are a Japanese WN protagonist Arc.)

Thinking it over a bit, I came to the conclusion that we should avoid getting too deeply involved with the situation since we had no idea what the circumstances were. I gently grabbed Ponta be the scruff of her neck and handed her to Ariane.

When Ariane caught Ponta in her arms she twirled before happily stroking the smiling Ponta's head and throat.

I put down my luggage and cleared my throat before speaking in a relatively calm tone.

"Harrumph, a～～. I'll be back in a bit."

After saying so I ran down the hill and lightly called out to both of the groups that had yet to notice me.

"Hey, I'm sorry but could you give me directions～?"

My careless and inappropriate comment caused the tension to rise even further. Everyone eye focused on me before one of the members of the larger group shouted.

"Damn! Looks like these bastards got reinforcements!!"

Apparently they've decided to count us as one of their targets because we cut into a rather tense situation.

At the man's shout, two people from the surrounding group brandished their weapons as they rushed me. The swords they had seemed to be mediocre and blunt versions of the those sold in a weapon shop.

To prove my assumption, I caught their attacks without drawing my sword or shield and I didn't even feel an itch. As expected of the mythical grade『Belen's Saint Armor』, weapons of this level wouldn't be able to put a scratch in it.

"What the…!? This guy is wearing full body armor!"

The men with the swords were surprised that their attacks were brushed off and one of them angrily shouted when he saw my armor peeking through my cloak.

Hearing that, the other man sneaked up to my outstretched arm in an attempt to lunge at the gap in my armor. I caught the blade of the sword with my outstretched hand and used pure strength to shatter it.

"Aa－!! My sword－!!"

The man had a grim expression on his face as he cried about his broken sword, but his eyes rolled back into his head after I hammered a punch to his jaw and he started to fall.

“Shit!!”

The other man cursed as he took a leap forward and lunged his sword towards the gap between the helmet and chest section of my armor. I simply took the attack before grabbing the man by the collar and head-butted him, helmet and all.

There was a dull sound as the man’s nose broke and started to bleed. He dropped his sword and fell to the ground groaning.

“I wanted to settle this a little bit more gently……”

I muttered that as I looked upon the two fallen men.

When I looked at the surrounded adventures, I saw that they were in a circular formation with their backs to one another as they managed to fend of their attackers, even though they were under constant assault.

Even though they were rather young, they seemed quite capable.

The men from the larger group were starting to show signs of impatience as the fight was more difficult than they anticipated. In the midst of this chicken race, I called out in an attempt to shake things up again.

“Excuse me, my opponents appear to be tired, can I have some new ones?”

Once again everyone’s attention was focused on me

My question caused the members of the bandit group to hesitate and look around. As if we were under some kind of agreement, the young adventurers used the opening to go on the offensive.

One bandit dropped his sword after his fingers were sliced off while another was rendered unconscious by a shield bash to the face. One was even forced to step back after one of his eyes was cut out.

Out of the remaining eight people, two were unable to continue and one had lost the will to fight. Once they lost their numerical advantage the bandits started to disperse.

However, the young adventures didn’t waste their chance and immediately targeted their opponents to strike them down. After the five of them were done, there was still one man who was running away with his tail between his legs. Apparently he had been lucky enough to have not been marked by anyone.

“However, someone has already snuck around.”[1]

I stood in front of the man with my knees slightly bent and my arms stretched out as I

repeated a certain line I'd heard somewhere before.

The man stopped in his tracks as he looked up in irritation at the two-meter tall knight, me, that had suddenly appeared in front of him.

The man didn't give up and tried to flee in another direction, but I quickly moved in front of him again.

"However, someone has already snuck around."

I repeated the line mechanically after blocking his path.

The man's expression shifted from irritation to grim determination. It was understandable considering the circumstances of facing an enemy one couldn't run away from.

When faced with a situation like this, one had to make a decision: you either resign yourself to your fate, or you choose to fight the enemy.

The man in front of me choose to fight.

"Dokeeeeeeyoooo!!"

He recklessly swung his weapon straight at me. It was a desperate sink or swim move. However, I simply dodged the attack and knocked the man out with a quick jab to the chin.

When I turned back to the area with the young adventurers I saw that the last bandit had already thrown down his weapon.

The young adventurers began tying up the defeated bandits with some ropes they had, while the last bandit stared at me with enmity. One of the youths approached me and knelt before me with his head down.

"Knight-sama we appreciate your help. Thanks to you, we were able to safely capture these bandits."

The youth offered me his gratitude in that position. So the group from before really had been bandits.

"I'm just an adventurer. There's no need to humble yourself."

When I said that, the young man looked like he couldn't believe it as he slid his eyes over the armor that managed to peek out from under my cloak before he looked back at Ariane standing at the top of the hill. Having gained some sort of understanding the man nodded before standing up.

"That was rude of me, I apologize. Sorry for the late introduction, but my name is Axel and I'm the leader of this party. I appreciate your help."

He must have thought we were nobles traveling incognito or something, since he was

speaking in an exaggerated tone. Nevertheless, he was still polite. He may have been young, but he was rather educated.

“Once again, we’re grateful for your help, but would you be willing to leave the ones you caught with us? I’ll properly compensate you, of course.”

The man looked back at his friends who were in the middle of tying up the other bandits after he bowed his head to me.

“We just happened to come along by chance, there’s no need to go out of your way.”

“Are you sure about that? If we take these bandits to Lanbaltic, the Nozan slave traders will pay a reasonable price for them, you know?”

Axel tilts his head in puzzlement of my answer.

It appears that apart from elves and beastmen, criminals were the next highest candidates for enslavement. Were the next ones on the block those with outstanding debts?

When we had assaulted the Etsuato company in Rhoden’s capital I had freed some human slaves to distract the guards, but there could have been brutal criminals among them.

Reflecting on my actions, I may have been a little impulsive with my actions back then.

“Hum, will this Nozan slave dealer buy all of the bandits?”

“No, Nozan is the name of the country on the other side of the Burugo gulf. Slave dealers from that country come to Lanbaltic to buy criminals by the shipload.”

Axel pointed to the sea as he explained the situation with the Nozan kingdom.

Even if criminal slaves are brought in large quantities, I doubted they would be working in the homes of people. After all, they wouldn’t hesitate baring their fangs at their owners, so they’ll most likely be put to work for the community as forced labors for a feudal lord’s land development.

“In that case, we’ll have to decline then.”

I declined Alex’s offer again and offered my goodbyes.

“Thank you very much!”

I waved my hand back at them for a while before climbing the hill back to where Ariane was playing with Ponta.

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[1]「しかし、回り込まれてしまった」Based on research (aka. google) we concluded that this was a meme in Japan.

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Translated by uselessno4